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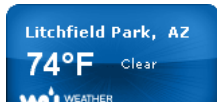
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[Home \(/\)](#) · [News \(/articles/news\)](/articles/news) · Nutcracker becoming West Valley tradition



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Nutcracker becoming West Valley tradition

Submitted by Glenn Gullickson on Wed, 12/14/2016 - 12:00am

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year's Nutcracker ballet presented by the Southwest Ballet Co. This year's performance runs at 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at the Performing Arts Center at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale. Submitted photo

Holiday ballet to run at Estrella Mountain Community College

A ballet troupe is creating a West Valley tradition by staging a local production of the holiday classic *The Nutcracker*.

The Southwest Ballet Co. will stage four performances of the ballet at 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at the Performing Arts Center at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

Productions of *The Nutcracker* are plentiful this time of year, but Melissa Zervas Hahne, Southwest Ballet's artistic director, said her company's show is special because it's local.

"The exciting thing about our company is that it's located in the Southwest Valley," Hahne said of the ballet school and troupe she formed two and a half years ago that's based in Goodyear.

"There was a need for classical ballet in our area," Hahne said.

It's the second year the group has performed a full-length *Nutcracker*, famous for a score written in 1892 by Tchaikovsky set to a Christmas Eve story about Clara, battling gingerbread soldiers and mice and the nutcracker who becomes a prince.

Hahne said attendance last year justified adding a performance to this year's run.

Providing choreography and staging is Daniel Baudendistel, who will also dance in the production, which will be performed to recorded music.

"He's been around the world dancing classical ballet," Hahne said. "He preserves the classical quality that *The Nutcracker* has had through the years as it was initially intended."

Hahne said she hired seven guest artists to perform alongside about 50 student dancers.

The cast includes dancers as young as 4 from Hahne's dance school, who will play angels and mice, to students at EMCC where she teaches ballet as an adjunct instructor, who will be part of the party scene.

"It's a lot of dancers," she said.

That means a lot of costumes, which were donated by a dance school in Oklahoma, where Hahne trained.

"When they get the new, we get the old," she said. "It saved us thousands of dollars."

Hahne said staging the ballet at the 300-seat theater at the Performing Arts Center has been a benefit to the company.

"It's provided a huge resource for us," she said of the space that's home to the college's theater program. "We have a special relationship with them. It's become a real collaboration."

Besides providing some of the dancers, EMCC theater students also work as members of the show's crew.

"They work our backstage, they build our sets, they hang our designer lighting," Hahne said.

A "Sugar Plum Shop" set up in the theater's lobby will sell nutcrackers, ornaments and ballet gifts as a fundraiser for the troupe, she said.

WHAT: The Nutcracker ballet

WHEN: 7 p.m.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Performing Arts Center at Estrella Mountain Community College, 3000 N. Dysart Road, Avondale

COST: \$24 for adults, \$18 for students (18 and younger), free for EMCC students who reserve seats online and take student ID to will call. Tickets are available at swbnutcracker.brownpa.pertickets.com.

INFO: southwestballettheatre.org

Glenn Gullickson can be reached at ggullickson@westvalleyview.com
(<mailto:ggullickson@westvalleyview.com>).

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